

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

Our family friend, the late Mike Pratt, once warned “Be careful who your heroes are”. This is wise advice. Today’s letter will be about a good man, Glenn Cunningham. He is a “hero” worthy of your admiration. Among the many honorable things he did was run a Christian Youth Ranch for over 30 years helping over 9,000 disadvantaged children to succeed. His motto was “never quit”.

His own life is a dramatic demonstration of that motto. As an 8 year old Kansas boy Glenn was responsible for coming to school early and starting a fire in a pot bellied stove. Unfortunately someone had put gasoline in the kerosene can. When Glenn lit the match there was an explosion. The explosion was so severe that it killed his brother and burned Glenn so badly burned that the doctor did not expect him to live. When he did survive, the doctor predicted that his badly burned legs would condemn him to be a cripple for the rest of his life. Glenn had no motor ability from the waist down and his legs just dangled and were all but lifeless. The outlook was grim.

A year went by before he was able to venture outdoors. One sunny day his mother pushed his wheel chair outside for some fresh air. When she left he threw himself to the ground, and began crawling with his arms and dragging his lifeless legs behind him. When he reached the picket fence he somehow managed to stand and drag himself from one picket to the other. He did this day after day until he had worn a path around their yard. After learning to walk again, he pushed himself to run. He would grab a cow by the tail and try to keep up with her without falling. He did learn to run, even though his scarred legs prevented him from running with a normal stride. True to his motto, however, he didn’t quit!

From this humble beginning Glenn went on to become one of the greatest runners of all time.

- As a senior at the Elkhart, Kansas high school he won the mile run at the Kansas Relays.
- At Kansas University he won six Big-6 mile runs, two NCAA titles and eight AAU national titles.
- After winning the AAU championships in 1932 he placed fourth in the 1500 meters at the Los Angeles Olympics.
- He was even more successful in 1933 sweeping the 800 and 1500 meter runs at the AAU nationals. He then toured Europe and was undefeated in 20 races. That same year he won the prestigious Sullivan Award as the nation’s top amateur athlete.
- The following year he set a new record for the mile run in 4:06.8.
- At the 1936 Berlin Olympics he finished second in the 1500 meter run and two weeks later set the world record for 800 meters at 1:49.7. While sailing the Atlantic en-route to Europe he became friends with Jesse Owens and was voted the most popular athlete on the team.
- He was virtually undefeated in indoor competition and was named the most outstanding track and field performer in the history of Madison Square Gardens.
- In 1938, running on Dartmouth College's oversized track, he set a world indoor mile record of 4:04.4, surpassing the outdoor record by a full two seconds.
- After earning a master's degree from the University of Iowa and a doctorate from New York University, Cunningham retired from competition in 1940. For four years was director of physical education at Cornell College in Iowa.
- As we have already pointed out, he and his wife opened the Glenn Cunningham Youth Ranch helping over 9,000 disadvantage children.

- Glenn passed away March 10, 1988.

Famous missionary C.T. Studd composed the poem “Only one life will soon be passed, and only what’s done for Christ will last.” In reality, most of Cunningham’s many earthy achievements will not be remembered in eternity. Further, they pale into insignificance in comparison to the eternal treasure he will receive for helping people. Like the 24 elders whom John saw in heaven, Glenn will cast his earthly crown before God’s throne and say: **“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power . . .” (Rev. 4:10,11).**

Cunningham is a hero who sets a good example for everyone. I am convinced that one reason he was able to overcome his physical infirmities was because of his faith in Jesus Christ. Believing in Jesus is a wonderful example for everyone. **“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:4,5).**

As Glenn Cunningham would say: “never quit”!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce